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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to identify the most effective marketing techniques used by urban community colleges to recruit minority students. A 16-item, open-ended questionnaire was used in telephone interviews with marketing officials at 24 colleges. The colleges selected for the survey served an urban community of 100,000 or more residents, had a largely minority student population, and had an existing marketing program. Study findings, based on responses from 22 colleges, included the following: (1) most college officials indicated that their institutions had instituted marketing primarily because of a decline in enrollment, and 54% of the participants had a marketing program operating for less than three years; (2) the products and services highlighted in the marketing efforts were comprehensive quality instructional programs, special vocational programs, and a mentoring program; (3) the respondents indicated that many urban minority students overestimated the cost of attending a local community college, and that marketing stressed financial aid services and unique assistance progams; (4) officials provided many examples of the off-campus locations where classes were offered; (5) successful promotional efforts included direct mail, appealing class schedules and brochures, frequent news releases, a speakers bureau, radio/television spots, and high school visits; and (6) 50% reported increases in enrollment attributable to marketing efforts. (AJL)

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# ANALYZING MARKETING STRATEGIES DESIGNED TO INCREASE MINORITY STUDENT ENROLLMENT AT SELECTED URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

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MECCA

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A Study Completed in Conjunction with the Marketing Efforts of Community Colleges in America (MECCA) Project

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this exploratory study was to identify and examine a select number of urban community colleges from around the nation to discover what marketing strategies proved to be most effective in recruiting minority students to their respective local community colleges. All of the institutions involved in this project served a predominantly minority population in their service areas which was reflective in their student population. A review of the literature shows that a decreasing proportion of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students are opting not to pursue higher education after high school. The case was presented in the study that this nation can not afford to lose this valuable human resource at a time in our history when our leadership role is being challenged on many fronts. The need for such a study, then, was to try to identify and describe effective means used by these select colleges to reach and attract urban minority students to their campuses.

The focus on the urban community colleges is critical because research shows that most urban minority students who do enroll in higher education do so at their local community college campus because it is convenient, accessible (most have open-door policies), tends to be least expensive, and usually provides the necessary support services needed by the first generation college student. The results outline specific techniques and methods that have proven successful by some urban community colleges around the country. The study also provides an overview of the demographics, marketing structure, costs, and barriers experienced by these urban institutions as they continuously strive to make their constituents aware of their educational services and programs.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

Data were obtained from the findings of the 1987 national study of marketing efforts of community colleges in America (MECCA) which initially solicited involvement from 978 accredited, comprehensive, community colleges listed with the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC). Some 334 institutions expressed a willingness to participate in the MECCA study and 237 eventually completed all of the survey information. It was from the list of these 237 institutions that the researcher was able to identify 24 community colleges which fulfilled the following criteria used to define the sample population:

a. The institution serves an urban community of 100,000 or more population.
b. The institution serves a majority minority student population. There were three institutions which were used in the study that were within 1 or 2 percentage points of the 50% level.
c. The institutions indicated in the MECCA study that they have an existing marketing program.

The 24 urban community colleges were located in these five regions of the United States: East Coast, South, Midwest, Southwest, and West Coast. Of the original 24 institutions that were identified, 22 participated fully in this study for a response rate of 91.7%.

A 16 item open-ended questionnaire was developed with the advice and feedback of an advisory committee which included professionals in marketing and research. Key marketing officials at each of the participating colleges, identified through MECCA records, were contacted by mail during January, 1988 and sent the survey instrument in advance to a prearranged telephone interview. During January and February of 1988, each of the key participants were interviewed by telephone and their responses to the questions posed on the survey instrument were analyzed by following response categories: institutional and student body demographics, the

organization of a college's marketing program, level of effectiveness in reaching minority students, barriers to achieving a successful marketing program, perceived reasons for the decreasing minority student population in higher education, highlights of successful marketing efforts in product/service, price, place of instruction, and promotional efforts, and finally, triggering mechanisms which might propel the urban minority student to seek out higher education.

## FINDINGS

It was reported in the demographic section of the findings that 50% of the respondents in the study were either in public affairs or marketing while the remaining participants held more traditional academic titles such as Director, Dean, or President. With an average enrollment of 10,572 students, the urban community colleges served a majority minority population with these ethnic groups represented (in descending percentage order): Black (39%), Hispanic (23%), Oriental (11%), and Native American (6%). The average age of the students served was 27.7 years and the majority (64%) were women. Nearly two-thirds of the students served needed financial assistance and the same fraction were employed either part or full time while attending college. A majority of the students needed remedial academic assistance and nearly half indicated that their primary goal in college was to prepare for employment.

Most college officials indicated that their institutions had instituted marketing primarily because of a decline in enrollment and most participants (54%) had a marketing program operating for less than three years. The marketing programs in these urban colleges were primarily controlled by central administration. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents felt that their marketing program was either "very effective" or "effective" in reaching their target population. There was wide disparity in the amount of funds used by each college for their marketing effort but there appeared to be no

relationship between level of effectiveness of the marketing program in reaching the target population and the level of expenditure per student for promotional efforts.

Participating officials revealed what they believed were barriers to a successful marketing program. Such things as inadequate funding, staff resistance to marketing, poor internal planning, staff "inertia", overbearing time commitments, lack of a key marketing leader, and insufficient staffing were some of the more evident barriers that the college officials identified. Officials were also asked to provide their insights regarding the problem of decreasing numbers of minority students pursuing higher education. Nine broad contributing factors were identified which included economic factors, poor academic preparation, a value system which does not give special emphasis to education, a dysfunctional family structure, societal competition for young employees, communication blocks, poor self-concept, a failing K-12 educational system, and insufficient involvement of business and industry in the educational process.

Examining the four aspects of marketing, product, price, place of instruction, and promotional efforts, the researcher was able to identify examples of successful marketing efforts in the services provided by the urban community colleges:

**1. Products/Services:** Comprehensive quality instructional programs, special vocational programs, and a mentoring program were highlighted by the responding officials. Some of the unique programs covered in the study included a drama troupe, brain bowl program, recruitment jamboree, science institute, and an honors program.

**2. Price:** Respondents stressed that many urban minority students have an inflated and unrealistic opinion of the cost of attending the local community college. The average per semester hour charge of the colleges involved in this study was approximately $16, with the West Coast colleges charging the least tuition. The

importance of comprehensive financial aid services and unique assistance programs was stressed by the participants.

**3. Place:** Officials provided many examples of the different locations where the urban colleges provide instruction in the effort to reach out to their constituents. Instruction was conducted in satellite centers located in neighborhoods, in local industrial firms, and offered in such diverse sites as hospitals, churches, nursing homes, youth centers, military bases, and even airports.

**4. Promotion:** Successful promotional efforts appeared to center around such activities as using direct mail, producing appealing class schedules and brochures, enhancing institutional reputation, providing frequent news releases, instituting a speakers bureau, effectively using radio and television spots, conducting frequent and continuous high school visitations, and initiating an elementary and/or junior high school adoption program.

Trying to trigger a positive response from the urban minority population was a challenge faced by all of the participating colleges. Some of the more effective approaches used to stimulate reaction by local residents included promoting the idea that a highly paid, satisfying position requires education and training, highlighting positive role models, stressing improved life-style through advanced learning, and encouraging closer involvement of the faculty and staff with elementary and junior high school students. There was also the realization that external influences created by local, state, or federal legislation can have a positive impact on increasing minority enrollment. A very recent example is the new amnesty legislation which requires the recent eligible legal aliens to enroll in an educational program to improve their command of the English language and obtain a solid understanding of the American governmental system. Specific marketing techniques which proved to be successful with various target populations were covered in the study. Some of the conclusions drawn from this undertaking are discussed next.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study examined 22 selected urban community colleges in America which serve a predominantly minority population. An effort was made to identify and describe the marketing techniques they employed to increase the number of minority students enrolling in their respective institutions. The study was conducted with the idea that the findings would be helpful in assisting other urban community colleges in developing effective marketing techniques which they might consider as they work to increase their minority student enrollment. There were eight original research questions presented at the start of the study and the researcher will present answers that can best be determined from the data obtained.

**1. What specific marketing techniques were employed that proved to be most effective in recruiting minority students to urban community colleges?** In the study, four aspects of marketing were examined as they applied to the urban setting.

### PROGRAM/SERVICE

With the product or service aspect, the urban colleges tended to stress the comprehensiveness of their academic program, including liberal arts transfer sequence, developmental studies, vocational courses, and personal interest/community service programs. There was a close articulation developed with area high schools and a strong emphasis placed on vocational-technical training to further promote the relationship between an education and employment. Special internship and volunteer service experiences were presented as effective ways to provide the student with a realistic grasp of the complexity of the problems facing our society and the need for further study and research to find solutions.

A mentoring program was seen by many as an effective way to help motivate the student on to new levels of achievement.

The pre-collegiate assessment process which provides skill assessment, academic advising, course placement, orientation to college, and registration was seen as a valuable service which started the student off on a solid base and helped to assure a high retention rate. Some of the special programs that were cited included a fine arts program stressing Black theatrical performers, "Brain Bowl Olympics", recruitment jamborees, science institutes, honors programs, and external mentoring provided by local business and industrial leaders all were felt to be especially helpful. Regardless of the program or activity, the officials felt that the program should encourage close student contact with faculty and staff, should engender involvement with key community and commercial officials, and should have the support and involvement of the president.

## PRICE

Price was the second aspect examined. The study found that the average semester hour charge was $16.35 and that cost is a major concern of the urban student population. It was noted by many that there is a misperception among the urban citizens that the community college costs are as high as private and public universities. All campuses stressed their low tuition costs and promoted the comprehensive nature of their financial aid services. Every attempt was made to provide whatever assistance is needed to help the students complete the lengthy and complicated financial aid application forms. Some campuses use a "hot line" so that students can call the college and talk directly with someone who can provide the assistance they need when trying to complete the application materials. There were some special incentive grants provided by local governments to provide the aid needed by many urban citizens seeking an education. The presidential honors scholarship was seen

by many as another positive program to recognize urban high school graduates who have academic promise but lack financial resources.

## PLACE OF INSTRUCTION

Accessibility, proximity, and convenience are the key factors when considering place of instruction. Students come to community colleges because they are located near their homes. For many urban dwellers who cannot afford to own their own automobile, city transportation is critically important and many college officials pointed out that an effective program may hinge upon how accessible the local rapid transit system is to a community college. It was mentioned that a number of different locations were used to offer instruction to the students. From county jails to airport terminals, from local industrial plants to community centers, colleges provide instruction wherever they have an audience and wherever the need is expressed. In planning for their instructional offerings, the college staff indicated that the special needs of the students were always considered. If for example, it was found that a number of kitchen helpers in the restaurant district needed a special course in sanitation, the college might provide the instruction in one of the restaurants during the off hours.

## PROMOTION

Direct mail campaigns including letters, brochures, and especially the course schedule were seen by many respondents as an effective way to promote their institution. But a critical activity related to this effort is the timely follow-up to initial inquiries made by prospective students. Also, the schedule of classes is especially effective when promotional articles are included with the general course information. Timely news releases, speakers bureaus including college faculty and staff, and various radio and television spots did make some impact. Spanish speaking stations are

important communication vehicles in the Hispanic community and "soul music" stations appear to have penetration in the Black community, especially among the younger students. Close articulation with high school and junior high school staffs are very important along with frequent meetings of the president with local education and church officials.

Most effective of all promotional activities, reported by the officials, is simple word of mouth which is based upon the reputation of the campus. Students who have a positive experience at the college will spread the message to the important other people in their lives. Whatever promotional technique is employed, the important thing is that the message being sent accurately reflects the mission and goals of the college and is being properly received by the audience without distortion or confusion. An important question to be asked in this area is: "What message is being received by our audiences in regards to who we are and what we do?" Finally, the data in this study indicated that the promotional cost of marketing an institution on a per student basis is not an accurate determinant of a successful marketing program.

**2. Which marketing techniques were most successful in triggering the need arousal with the minority population?** The opinions and reactions of the key marketing officials indicated that any technique which will demonstrate a linkage between education and employment is critically important in triggering the need arousal within minority students to seek additional education. Campuses must continue to work with students to help them see the difference between unskilled low, paying service jobs and well paying careers. Close working relationships with local business and industrial officials can assist in this process. In addition to athletes and entertainment celebrities, campuses must promote other types of successful role models, such as the small business person, the competent technician, the school teacher, etc. Small support group sessions to

discuss career and life goals can provide new incentive and encouragement for many inner city men and women.

Many respondents felt that there was a new thrust coming from state and federal officials to promote education and advanced training among the urban youth. By adopting a school, college officials can lend resources and emotional support to their high school, junior high school, or elementary school colleagues and help in the retention programs and thereby help to increase the educational horizons of the younger students. The most critical element for triggering the motivational level of the urban youngster to continue on in school is to develop a close, caring, communication link with a staff member who can provide essential guidance, advice, and emotional support. An ad, radio spot, or brochure cannot replace the one-on-one human interaction.

**3. Who were the key participants in the planning and implementation of the marketing efforts?** In most instances, marketing efforts were not begun until there was an appreciable decline in enrollment. Most of the campuses (over two-thirds) indicated that they had a marketing program in force for two years or longer. The key people involved in the planning and implementation of the program tended to be the Director of Public Affairs, followed by the Dean of Students and the Director of Admissions and Records and less frequently, the President and the Assistant to the President. Counselors and Financial Aid Directors were involved in this planning process but were mentioned less often by the respondents. Those campuses which had strong presidential support tended to have better financial resources available to them ($23/student (high presidential support) vs. $10/student (low presidential support) ) and appeared to have better results.

Regardless of the structure used, it is apparent that marketing is not a quick-fix remedy to resolve an institutional problem. Rather, it is a long process involving research, discussion, planning, and action. Invariably, it involves a highly motivated leader who is

goal oriented and can help establish a shared vision of ultimate results and do what is necessary to assure that program momentum is maintained. The President plays a monumental role in this process.

**4. What kind of administrative structure was present in developing and implementing this specialized marketing effort?** Of the four types of administrative structure involved in the marketing effort (administrative dominated, marketing committee dominated, student services dominated, and marketing division dominated), half of the campuses reported that they were structured by an administrative dominated organization and a fourth were marketing committee dominated. There was no prevalence of any of these types noted by size or location of the reporting campuses. It appears that many college officials feel that they can respond more rapidly to changing circumstances under an administrative dominated structure. It was observed that in 80% of the cases, the marketing program budget was part of the regular operational budget and there was considerable variation in the costs per student devoted to marketing. The range was from a $1 per student to $77 per student. Even with such variation, there appeared to be little relationship between cost per student and total effectiveness. A better gauge for marketing success with these urban community colleges might be effectiveness in planning, level of staff enthusiasm and institutional support for the program, and judicious use of the funds and resources available.

**5. What kind of enrollment impact was made over the past two years which could be attributed to the marketing program?** Fifty percent of the colleges reported that they had an increase in the number of recent minority high school graduates in the past two years with an average increase of 6.1% each year. It was felt that the marketing effort was directly responsible for this increase. It was noted that slightly more than a third of the campuses (36%) saw no appreciable increase and 14% saw a decline

of 5.5% over the two year period. Overall, nearly two-thirds of the campuses indicated that they felt they were either very effective or effective in achieving their marketing goals through through their organized program.

**6. Which marketing efforts appeared to be most effective in reaching the different minority groups?** Nearly half of the reporting institutions indicated that they used a different approach to reach different minority groups and to reach non-traditional students. Only 19% of the campuses reported using a different marketing approach to reach female or male students. Black students were more responsive to role models, communication through church, direct mail with appropriate follow-up, soul music radio stations, and information on college transfer and employment opportunities. Hispanic students appeared more responsive to materials written in Spanish, to Hispanic staff members, newspaper articles in local Hispanic papers, television stations which broadcast Spanish speaking programs, especially the "soaps", and interaction between college staff members and the entire family of a prospective student. To reach women, focus can be placed on having female staff members interact with women's organizations to promote the programs and services of the institution, special mother-daughter programs can be very helpful, promotion of career programs which traditionally have been held primarily by women have been effective, and developing special programs for women who need to reenter the workforce as the sole bread-winner of their household. For the non-traditional students, it was found important to stress in promotional materials (through text and pictures) that the college serves all age groups, that churches can help promote the life-long learning message, that community centers can promote the educational offerings, and that senior citizens can play a vital role on campus in such areas as child care, tutoring, and mentoring with the younger students.

**7. What was the profile of the minority students recruited by the urban community colleges?** Most often the

urban community college served a primarily female population, aged 27-30 years. Most are Black and have a need for financial assistance even though a majority do work on either a part-time or full-time basis while attending college. Chances are very great that most of the newly recruited students will need some form of remedial assistance in writing, reading, or computational skills. Many students seek occupational skills for job entry positions or for career promotion opportunities. The average urban campus involved in this study had a student headcount enrollment of 10,000 and served an area with a population of 600,000 citizens. Two-thirds of the students were minority members, primarily Black and Hispanic students.

**8. What recommendations do the marketing staff members of the urban community colleges with effective programs have for other professionals at similar institutions who are seeking increased participation rates from their target minority population?** Each of the respondents was asked to reflect upon the challenges that they have encountered with their marketing efforts and to make recommendations and suggestions for the other urban community colleges in the country striving to increase their minority target population. In essence, what broad marketing concepts can be conveyed to other campuses seeking to improve their recruitment efforts of minority students? From this discussion, the following eleven ideas emerged:

A. COMMUNITY VISIBILITY: It was reemphasized that the community college staff, from president on down, must be visible in the community by interacting with various community organizations, agencies, and institutions. Visibility and staff involvement can take various forms including membership, speaking engagements, and serving as a community resource person. The institution should work to become the focal point for community development activity. Community service organizations, governmental agencies, and church groups should be invited to hold meetings at the campus and college

personnel should take an active role in these meetings. As mentioned earlier in this paper, adopting a school is an excellent way to demonstrate that the community college personnel are interested and willing to expend time, effort, and talent to assist in the challenging work of assuring that our minority youth are being properly prepared to face a world of economic challenge and political strife. The more successful we are in retaining our minority youth in the educational system through cooperative professional effort, the more likely we will realize increasing numbers continuing their education beyond high school.

B. STRESS ONE-ON-ONE CONTACTS: Minority youth need the constant reassurance and encouragement that can only come from close, one-on-one contacts with the professional staff. A mentoring program can go a long way in helping each minority student have a successful experience. Some have recommended having the honor students and members of Phi Theta Kappa, the national honors fraternity for community college students, work as mentors at the junior high and elementary level, to portray a sort of academic big brother or sister who can assist in helping one make it through the rigors of academia. Our minority youth need desperately to be exposed to positive role models, men and women successful in business, industry, military, education, and government fields. The theme comes through loud and clear: put emphasis on professional people as resources and less emphasis on simply purchasing more advertisement. The success of a marketing program will be contingent upon the genuine quality experience that a student has with a one-on-one relationship with a college staff member.

C. PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT OF MARKETING: For a marketing program to be truly successful, it is critical that the president of the institution (the 5th P of marketing, mentioned earlier) have a solid understanding of marketing and make a commitment in resources to assure that the marketing role has its prominent place within the institution. Far too many chief executive officers give lip service to marketing and simply equate it to merely "running

more ads". A professional marketing effort will begin with an internal audit of the institution to determine what the perceived mission and goals of the institution are, to determine the perceived strengths of the institution, and to determine which needs can best be fulfilled through existing programs and services. Through an external audit, institutional staff can determine the needs of the service area and identify specific target populations who could benefit from the programs and services provided. By promoting those positive things that an institution does best, the service area public will have a clearer image of what is the institution's mission and goal. The press and encouragement for this marketing process must come from the top, the president.

D. LINK EDUCATION WITH EMPLOYMENT: Colleges should seek and utilize the expertise of local business and industrial leaders to help students gain a greater understanding of the importance of training and education to employment skills and the link between education and career opportunities. Cooperative education programs are excellent vehicles for this vitally important exposure to business and industry. From such an experience the student should learn first-hand that the problems encountered in the real world of business and commerce require skill, talent, insight, and the ability to think analytically. Volunteer and experiential learning assignments are another method to expose students to the real world of social and economic issues. By working with professionals in various fields of education, social service, and government, the students will come to realize the complexity of problems facing society and the need for educated leaders to work to find solutions.

E. WORK CLOSELY WITH CHURCHES: Some might consider clergy members as colleagues in the field of education, in that religious instruction requires the same learning skills required in academia. Black ministers and Catholic priests tend to have a powerful impact on the lives of minority Americans living in our urban centers. There is a very good likelihood that greater than 60% of the students served in an urban community college are active in some type of

religious following. By working closely with the local pastoral association, the president can develop a very powerful support network for the college's programs. It is encouraged that the president meet regularly with the local pastoral group (possibly a once a month breakfast meeting) to discuss common problems and share resources
and talents.

F. SENSITIZE STAFF TO ALL PEOPLE: Many minority Americans come to the college setting with a great deal of fear and anxiety. Most lack confidence in their abilities and have deep concerns about costs, program of study, and future career plans. Couple this with concerns about having to find reliable transportation to the campus, providing for children care services, and undue family pressures (in many Hispanic households, for example, there is still concern as to whether women should be going to college) and it becomes obvious that the student approaches the campus with some severe misgivings. For example, some potential students who are illegal aliens are fearful of having their status discovered once they enroll in an educational program. The community college which is attuned to these concerns and makes the commitment to greet each student with openness and friendliness will add tremendously to an effective marketing program. The staff which says and shows through actions that "you are welcome here and we will do everything we possibly can to help you reach your goals through a positive, growing experience" will "sell" the college more than any ads, posters, brochures, or letters. Such an attitude of care and concern must be demonstrated by every staff member, from the president to the janitor.

G. USE FOCUS GROUPS: To obtain an accurate assessment of student needs, concerns, and perceptions about collegiate study and career goals, college staff should meet with focus groups which are representative of the community. The top level administrative team, including the president, should be involved in these group sessions so that they can hear and learn firsthand the needs that

exist. From these meetings can come a clearer picture of effective ways in which the institution can provide assistance. So much can be learned from simply listening to the thoughts, dreams, and aspirations of the constituents who could be served by the institution.

H. HAVE A CONSISTENT AND PERSISTENT MESSAGE: It is important that the institution stress those points which accurately reflect the programs, services, and total educational experience that the students will encounter at the campus. The message must be consistent, accurate, and be repeated many times in various media that will reach the target population. Through an effective marketing program, the staff will have a very clear idea of what are the strongest assets of the institution and it is these which must be communicated continuously to the residents in the service area. Some of the most effective marketing campaigns in the commercial arena have themes which have remained the same year after year. For example, AT&T ("The Right Choice"), Ford ("Quality is Job One"), and McDonald's ("We Do It All For You!") effectively convey one dominant idea over and over again. Although the scenes and illustrations change over time, the message is still there and is identifiable with the company or product.

I. MARKETING EFFORT MUST HAVE TOTAL INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT: As mentioned earlier in this study, the president plays a key role in promoting the success of the marketing effort. But all of the institutional staff must be aware of the program and willing to help in their individually unique ways. The marketing effort should set specific goals, have specific activities designed to achieve the goal, set realistic timelines, identify key people, and establish some measurable outcomes so that the level of accomplishment can be assessed. Urban college officials report that they strive to get as many of their staff involved in the planning, organizing, and implementation of the marketing effort as possible. They also attempt to keep the entire staff informed of progress achieved and milestones reached regarding their marketing plan. It was stressed

by the respondents that it is important to follow the marketing plan and to make adjustments and corrections when they are deemed necessary. With total institutional "buy in" and a well thought-out plan, amazing things can be accomplished.

J. NO EASY, EFFORTLESS WAY: Respondents commented that there is no easy, effortless way to promote the institution; marketing does take work, time, and resources. Marketing will not bring immediate success in most cases but results will be seen in time. According to Dennis Johnson ( Speech given to Gateway Community College staff, 1986), it is not uncommon to see results 3, 4, 5, years after starting a marketing program. Sometimes staffs become disheartened when results are not readily seen within two or three months. Each institution must plan for its own unique service area needs and plan around the unique strengths possessed by its staff members. Marketing allows for experimentation and even failures can provide a learning experience. The Chinese have a saying which is very appropriate for marketers, "Failure is the mother of success.". If something is not working well, revisions should be made when it is deemed necessary. It was also stressed that the institution should allow some time to realize positive results. Finally, it was urged by some respondents that an institution must have faith in its staff and their planning ability. It is exciting to see what can be accomplished when men and women of great talent (such as those found on virtually all community college campuses) pool their resources and focus these on a common goal.

K. QUALITY IS THE BEST MARKETING TOOL: It was stressed by the participants that there is no substitute for quality programs and services offered by the institution. An urban college which actualizes its mission and goals by meeting the needs of the people in its service area will see its reputation spread primarily by word of mouth. A positive (and unfortunately, a negative) reputation will spread among the families, the businesses, the churches, and other educational institutions. Johnson (1986) indicates that a negative reputation spreads faster and further than does a positive one. If

the experience provided by the institution is perceived as a valuable experience, people will seek out the programs and services and a value exchange will take place. A college's reputation is the best advertisement one can ever find and it is something that cannot be purchased by using television or radio spots.

## OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

The institutional representatives were asked to project the success of their future marketing efforts and speculate whether or not more minorities would in fact participate in the educational offerings of their local community college in the next five year period. They were also asked to justify their answers. Eighty-two percent (18 colleges) of the respondents were optimistic and believed that more minorities would participate in higher education in the future. One college official was pessimistic in his outlook and the remaining three participants were unsure what the future will hold for minority student involvement in education.

The optimists cited a number of reasons for their positive outlook. First, most of the respondents cited the economic factor. As increasing numbers of Americans sink into a lower standard of living, the value of an education will be greatly enhanced. Those urban Americans on or below the poverty line, mostly minorities, will have fewer options available to them in completing a college education, simply because of the prohibitive costs involved in such an undertaking at a private or even public university. The community college, with its low tuition charges, will be one of the very few viable alternatives available to most American minorities coming from a poverty situation. Consequently, far fewer will look at the public university or private college as a cost effective choice for them. With aggressive financial aid marketing techniques, the

community colleges will be able to absorb an even greater share of the minority student market.

Next, more urban minority Americans will come to realize that to obtain a well paying job, an education and training are indispensable. To merely survive in our society with its high cost of living will force many more minority youth to pursue additional training at their local community college. Most community colleges provide excellent vocational-technical training which leads to entry level employment with advancement opportunities into higher paying positions. Today, for example, an individual can complete a 25-30 semester hour program in basic micro-computer repair technology and obtain a $15,000 per year entry level job. With additional training and experience, this individual could ultimately assume a $25-$30,000 position in a supervisory capacity More students will realize the necessity for additional training as they struggle to economically survive in a dynamic, technical world.

Third, it was pointed out by some that the parents of many minority youth who have themselves dropped out of school early or failed to continue in higher education will realize the limited opportunities available to them and will provide more support in their maturing years to their sons and daughters to continue their education. These parents who have limited, low skilled, low paying positions have constantly seen the advancement and higher paying positions go to those with a higher level of education and training. As mentioned earlier in this study, the importance of parental support, encouragement, and "emotional pushing" is critically important in helping the young person (or older son or daughter, for that matter) to continue their education. It appears that the mother is the key figure in this process in the Black family, and possibly in the Hispanic family as well.

Fourth, many of the respondents were optimistic that the community colleges would be doing a better job in the future in marketing their campuses and programs through well planned

efforts. Many felt that their colleges could improve the packaging of various programs and services so that the value of the educational experience might become more obvious to the perspective student. It was pointed out that one does not begin a marketing program operating at 100% efficiency; the marketing concept takes time to develop fully on the campus and once in place, can be finely tuned to better serve the campus and provide a better exchange of values that Kotler and Fox (*Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions,* 1985, 21-23) point out is so vital in the marketing process.

Next, there is a perception that more external attention will be focused on this issue in the next five years. Local and state governments are becoming more deeply concerned about the increasing drop-out figures in urban school systems serving primarily minority students and the increasing lack of involvement of minorities in higher education. State educational officials are seeking, and in many cases obtaining, financial and legislative support in promoting retention programs and exposing students to higher education at an earlier age. Some urban school districts are providing for special magnet schools with specialized curriculum and programs for the disadvantaged youth. In working closely with the community colleges, good articulation linkages are becoming more apparent between the high school and college. Also, with a new federal administration coming into office in 1989, many are optimistic about the commitments that top running candidates are making toward education. One candidate, for example, wants to be labeled, if elected, as the President who promoted education as the top priority in the nation.

Finally, many feel that the valuable experience that community college students have had at their local campus will continue to spread by word of mouth and enrollment will increase as the message spreads from friend to friend, family to family, and business to business. The perceived value-added experience will be spread by the reputation of the institution and more people will want to become a part of the program. Such a phenomenon does not

occur over night but the impact will be felt in the next five to ten year period.

It must be pointed out that there was one official who was very pessimistic about the future. He sees the long range trends in a negative light. There is increasing value placed on crime, drugs, and gang involvement and this anti-social value system is working against the sacrifice and deferred gratification that is requisite to completing a collegiate program of study. The trends show a continuation of a value system among many of our urban minority youth which espouses a belief that one can obtain great wealth and prestige through minimal effort (such as, for example, conducting a fast drug transaction). He fears that such a mental perspective is very much entrenched in our urban sub-cultures and will be almost impossible to break.

There were three college officials who were unsure about the future and they based their thoughts on three different dimensions. One official felt strongly that the federal government was not doing enough to truly address this problem of poor minority involvement in higher education. This individual was critical of the lack of involvement of the government in the urban community college plight and felt that unless there is sincere action taken with a true commitment of resources to these urban educational centers, there will be no appreciable gain made. She suggested that we need to not merely apply more federal dollars to this problem but rather investigate innovative ways to intervene in the lives of the urban minority youth so that a more meaningful impact is made.

A second college official felt that we must face the fact that there are racial dimensions to this problem. It is his contention that Asian students are not really part of the problem since they tend to excel in their academic work. The Asian students, according to this official, value an education and are willing to work to achieve high academic marks. He cited many California universities which have a disproportionate number of Asian students in their

programs. He feels that Hispanic students will probably respond more aggressively in the future with effective marketing programs and feels that there will be gains realized with this minority group. There were sincere doubts expressed when discussing our Black students. He indicated that we must search for ways to effectively build the self-concept and self-esteem of many of our urban Black young people. For too many, according to this official, the future is bleak and hopeless. He has little belief that an education will make much of a difference in their lives. He concluded that unless we can find effective ways to promote education and have our urban Black citizens see the connection between an education and the good life, the outlook is not encouraging.

Finally, the third official indicated that many urban community colleges are trying to form improved linkages with local high schools in an attempt to attract increasing numbers of their graduates or to assist in retention efforts to keep more students in high school until they can graduate. Since many minority youth have had negative experiences in high school, the thought of continuing their education and prolonging their academic agony is hard for them to accept. With a continued loss of various markets due to foreign competition, the well paying jobs will only go to those who have an exceptional education and specialized training. Will the minority youth in our urban centers come to realize that their career choices are dependent upon their level of education? Will the urban youth miraculously change their attitudes about the value of education? This institutional respondent was skeptical. He felt that we would not see a change of values toward education among our young urban minorities unless some strong intervening force is applied to their lives, possibly on a federal, state, or local level.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE AREAS OF STUDY

In view of the magnitude of the problems outlined in the first portion of this study, there are a number of areas that researchers may want to focus their attention on in the future. It is hoped that this study will stimulate sufficient thought and interest so that others will seek more information and insight into ways into which to increase the numbers of minority men and women seeking higher education experiences. The following areas might be of special interest to future researchers:

1. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS: Examination of special educational programs which utilize different instructional formats might be investigated to see if such new approaches can help retain minority youth and inspire them to continue their education beyond high school. Such programs as the "middle college" concept initiated by Dr. Janet Lieberman (Greenberg and Lieberman, "High Risk Students Make Big Gains", *Synergist,* Winter, 1981, pp. 58-65) in 1974 at New York City's LaGuardia Community College where instruction is provided to 10th, 11th, and 12th graders at a local community college appears to have great promise. Apparently, the retention rate experienced by Lieberman is exceedingly high for the at risk, minority urban youth that are served in the program. The following questions arise from this type of program:

A. What features of the program help to retain the students in school?

B. How many of the students continue on into institutions of higher learning and what were the contributing factors which lead to their decision to continue their education?

C. Are there curricular changes incorporated which allowed for the apparent increase in retention? If so, what are the changes used in the La Guardia program?

D. What type of marketing effort is employed to initially attract the young people into the program?

E. Can this type of program be replicated elsewhere? If it can, what changes are required by the other institutions before it can be incorporated?

2. SPECIAL VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS: There are some new programs consisting of youth service which have drawn a great deal of national attention, especially because of the educational component built into the program. (Pierce, 1987 and Raspberry, 1987) In essence, young people are recruited into a volunteer service project where they help the needy in urban centers or assist in conservation projects in national or state parks and recreational areas, similar to the successful Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) of the 1930s. The young are provided with some type of skill training (carpentry, electrical, plumbing, masonry, etc.) and receive educational instruction leading to the GED diploma and then on possibly to collegiate level work. Many proponents (Congressman Charles Robb, Dr. Charles Moskos (Northwestern University), and B.T. Collins, Director of California's Youth Corps) estimate that with federal support America could initiate a 650,000 youth program at a cost of $7 billion annually to taxpayers. If many urban, unemployed, unskilled minority youth could be recruited into the program, the proponents claim that crime would be reduced, literacy level raised, and productive, law-abiding, contributing members of society would be the result of the experience. The demand for an infusion of eager, young men and women into the workforce is evident on many fronts, including such obvious settings as our blighted urban cores, our polluted lakes and rivers, our national forests devastated from fires, our worn bridges, railroads, and dams. The call for a literate, skilled, ambitious, national workforce to resolve these real problems seems most evident.

The researcher sees great promise in this type of intervention program for many of our disadvantaged, urban youth and concurs with proponents that this youth corps program should be explored at many levels. However, there are many questions that must be answered, especially, as they relate to the role of the community college in this type of activity:

A. Could community colleges play a role in providing instruction and training for the young men and women recruited into the program?

B. What type of marketing campaign would be most effective in reaching our urban youth for this type of program?

C. Would urban youth respond to the challenge of working at rustic sites in wilderness settings as they did in the 1930s?

D. Could community colleges initiate similar programs on their campuses to recruit young men and women for social service work in their service areas?

3. FAMILY STRUCTURE: Since the family is the basic unit of any society and plays a vital role in the development of a value system among its members, a closer examination of the urban family structure may provide some knowledge on ways in which community college personnel can produce more effective marketing techniques to reach the youth, the middle-aged, and the senior citizens. Apparently the attributes of a strong family are expressive love, parental support, encouragement, and a stressing of such positive behavioral traits as honesty, respect for others, and assuming responsibility for ones actions. Some research areas to explore:

A. How many urban families exhibit the profile of the strong family?

B. What can be done to help the urban family exhibit the strong family attributes?

C. What values are stressed in the urban family? Some continuums might be competitiveness vs. cooperation, autocratic vs. permissive, friendly vs. hostile, orderly vs. chaotic, and such other focal points as power, control, winning, being right, athletic, musical, etc.

D. How can community college marketing personnel use the above information in planning effective marketing programs? For example, are there ways that an urban community college could use interest in entertainment to induce more students to consider enrolling in college after high school? (Dr. Mark Hopkins, President of Anderson College (South Carolina) suggests that music is an important tool to recruit and retain many urban Black students to academia.).

4. MARKETING FOCUS: The primary focus of this study has been on the urban community colleges and their attempt to reach minority target populations. There are other institutions in America, of course, including suburban campuses, rural campuses, technical training centers, and residential campuses. A study of these other types of community colleges could possibly answer these research questions:

A. Are there different marketing programs employed at suburban and rural college campuses to reach minority students, especially when they are relatively few of them in the service area?

B. Are there any special student housing problems associated with marketing residential campuses when trying to attract minority students?

C. Do marketing efforts make much difference in recruiting new students when an area has been economically depressed over a number of years?

D. What ways can business and industry take on even a more prominent leadership role in helping in the marketing effort to reach urban minority citizens.?

## CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The attempt has been made to describe effective marketing techniques employed by 22 selected urban community colleges in this country as they attempt to increase their minority enrollments. The intent is one of sharing their perceived successes in the hope that other institutions in similar settings might be able to gain some insight and improve their own minority recruitment programs. Early in this study, the profound demographic evolution was highlighted and the message was presented that America cannot afford to see millions of our urban minority citizens shun educational opportunities because of ignorance, fear, cost, or a value system which does not include higher education as an important force in their own personal growth and development. The plight of the at risk minority urban youth is quite clear. Our nation cannot afford ill-trained and low-skilled workers in the world economic competition of which we are a part. Senator Mark Hatfield (Oregon), at a recent American Association of Junior and Community Colleges (AACJC) conference in Las Vegas (April, 1988) exhorted the thousands of community college presidents, deans, and board members to think about the very defense of this nation, not in terms of weaponry and logistics, but rather in terms of skilled, trained, capable citizens. Our nation's very future depends on a highly educated citizenry, especially the urban minority members who by the year 2000 will number approximately one-third of America's

population. The future for these urban Americans is bleak unless ways are found to promote education, especially at the community college level, so that more men and women from minority backgrounds can realize their fullest human potential and live a life of dignity, success, and fulfillment.

Marketing efforts are one way that community college personnel can promote the services and programs needed by urban citizens. This study has demonstrated that there are effective ways to reach minority citizens but a successful effort requires planning, resource development, and involvement from the entire staff. Most important, marketing must be seen as a process of exchange in values. It is not and cannot be a quick-fix remedy but rather an on-going process of internal and external assessment and communication. The president's role is absolutely critical to a successful on-going campaign. But most important of all is the level of concern, compassion, and understanding that a dedicated staff bring to the college as they work to produce high caliber services and programs to meet student needs and bring forth the change in one's life that is the very kernel of an education. The reputation of the institution will speak more clearly and more eloquently than any radio, television, or newspaper ad. Community college personnel can assume their rightful leadership role in the future of this nation by effectively reaching out and providing the educational experiences needed by our minority citizens.

This study concludes with the sobering observation and charge from Dr. Robert Atwell, President of the American Council of Education (ACE) when he addressed the ACE delegates at their January, 1988 meeting in Washington, D.C. :

> "Higher education has a leadership role to play in turning the tide of minority participation. On each of your campuses, in each of your communities, it will require an arduous process of revising the campus agenda, changing individual priorities and habits, forcefully and willfully disrupting the status quo. It is one of the hardest leadership tasks to undertake, but the

stakes are very high. At the start of the 21st century, one-third of our nation will be minority. This third must be fully participating; if they are not, we will all suffer. To continue to drift on the current course not only will defer the American dream of a just and equitable society; it will signal the end of that dream. The economic toll will be as great as the human one, and we will all pay the price of so many citizens cast out of the productive mainstream."

Possibly the findings from this study can assist some of our urban community colleges to better reach their minority constituents through improved marketing techniques and thereby keep alive the American dream of fulfilled hope.

## URBAN CAMPUSES SELECTED FOR THE MARKETING STUDY

The following urban campuses had responded to the inital MECCA study and appear to meet the basic criteria of the research project, that is:

1. Having approximately 50% minority student body enrollment at their campus.
2. Situated in or serve an urban center with approximately 100,000 population
3. Having a formalized marketing program in operation.

| CAMPUS | STATE | POPULATION | ENRLMT | % MINORITY |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.Carver State (Mobile) | ALA | 204,000 | < 1,000 | 85% |
| 2.Southwestern C.C. | CA | 85,000(A) | >10,000 | 56 |
| 3. West LA CC | CA | 38,000(B) | 5,000 | 50 |
| 4. Contra Costa | CA | 19,000(C) | 5,000 | 50 |
| 5. Peralta CC | CA | 345,000 | >10,000 | 60 |
| 6. City Coll. of San Fran. | CA | 691,000 | >10,000 | 60 |
| 7. L.A. Mission C.C. | CA | 17,000(B) | 2,500 | 50 |
| 8. Greater Hartford C.C. | CT | 136,000 | 2,500 | 50 |
| 9. Miami Dade | FL | 382,000 | >10,000 | 73 |
| 10. City Coll. of Chicago | IL | 3 million | >10,000 | 60 |
| 11. Truman College (Chgo) | IL | 3 million | >10,000 | 67 |
| 12. Chgo Citywide Coll. | IL | 3 million | >10,000 | 52 |
| 13. State CC (E. St. Lou) | IL | 55,000(D) | 2,500 | 95 |
| 14. Roxbury CC(Boston) | MA | 560,000 | 2,500 | 70 |
| 15. Prince George CC | MD | 774,000 | >10,000 | 48+ |
| 16. CC of Baltimore | MD | 774,000 | 5,000 | 70 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17. Wayne CC (Detroit) | MI | 1.2 mill. | >10,000 | 85 |
| 18. Dona Ana CC (Las Cr) | NM | 50,000(E) | 1,000 | 55 |
| 19. CC of Philadelphia | PA | 1.7 mill. | >10,000 | 59 |
| 20. Laredo Jr. Coll | TX | 91,000 | 2,500 | 90 |
| 21. El Centro CC | TX | 944,000 | 5,000 | 60 |
| 22. Houston CC | TX | 1.7 mill. | >10,000 | 49+ |
| 23. Del Mar CC | TX | 246,000 | >10,000 | 49+ |
| 24. Shelby State CC | TN | 646,000 | 2,500 | 62 |

Notes:

(A) Serving the greater San Diego County with 1.8 million people.
(B) Serving the greater Los Angeles County with 7.5 million people.
(C) Serving the greater San Francisco area with approximately 700,000 people.
(D) Serving the greater St. Louis area with 978,000 people.
(E) Included because of the heavy Native American population.
(F) L.A. Mission Community College and Roxbury Community College did not participate in the study.

Source: Urban populations based upon1987 Rand McNally Atlas with 1980 census figures used. It is assumed that many of these communities have increased in population since 1980 and these figures are therefore very conservative.



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